

On Fundamental Human Rights, Our Pledge

Dr. Esther Brimmer

Recently the United States decided to run for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. That decision reflects a reinvigorated commitment on the part of the United States to the fundamental human values that bind us all together, and a determination to promote those values in all available venues.

This commitment, which remains most clearly voiced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is rooted in ideals outlined by the founding fathers of the United States and gradually, relentlessly, and at times painfully realized by succeeding generations of Americans. The ideals of yesterday have yielded an American society that treasures its freedoms, embraces its rich diversity, and celebrates its history of struggle and progress.

The United States is committed to advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world, and to support those who suffer from abuse and oppression as well as those who advocate for the abused and oppressed.

I am pleased to repeat that message today, and if elected to be a member of the Human Rights Council, the United States would exercise that determination at every opportunity. As recently stated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "We believe every nation must live by and help shape global rules that ensure people enjoy the right to live freely and participate fully in their societies."

We must work together to put the Human Rights Council on a path away from political bias and cynicism toward its intended role as a balanced, credible, and effective forum for the advancement of human rights.

And so, the United States pledges to work with our international partners in the spirit of openness and respect to consider areas of concern about human rights in any country, our own included. We will raise our voice in defense of people around the world who suffer from abuse and oppression. We will actively promote freedom of religion for individuals of all beliefs. We will defend freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and will fight racism, discrimination, and acts of violence committed because of racial or ethnic hatred.

The United States recognizes fully that concrete progress on any of these important human rights issues will require robust international cooperation. That recognition is apparent in our desire for a more active presence in the UN Human Rights Council, and equally apparent in our continued steadfast support for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Children's Fund, the UN Democracy Fund, and the UN Development Fund for Women, as well as our renewed support for the UN Population Fund.

It is further illuminated by the Administration's announced intent to work with the U.S. Congress to consider the possible ratification of human rights treaties including the Convention

on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and ILO Convention 111 Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation.

The United States envisions a world where human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons are realized, and where all countries possess a shared understanding of and appreciation for human dignity. While there is distance left to travel to make that world a reality, the United States pledges to be a full partner in that journey.

Dr. Brimmer is Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations. Read the U.S. human rights pledge in its entirety at www.state.gov/p/io/.